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CHURCH OBSERVER TEAM

GOES TO MIDDLEEAST

DPS 88028

NEW YORK (DPS, Feb. 25) -- The Presiding Bishop has named a five-person team to travel to the Diocese of Jerusalem in early March. The members are Mrs. Patti Browning, the Rt. Rev. Peter James Lee, Bishop of Virginia and a director of the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief, Dr. George McGonigle, Dr. Betty Coats, staff officer for Public Issues in Washington, and the Rev. Charles A. Cesaretti, deputy for Anglican relations. The team will leave for the Middle East on March 3, returning on March 9.

The team will observe the current Palestinian/Israeli conflict examine ways to support the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East in mediating this conflict, and to explore the role the Episcopal Church might play in terms of material and spiritual support.

Recently, following a week-long stay in the Diocese of Connecticut, the Rt. Rev. Samir Kafity, President-Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East and Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, visited New York, where he was installed as honorary canon in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. On a visit to the Church Center, he met with the Presiding Bishop, with members of the Middle East Team, and with other staff members.

"It is most important," he observed, "that the Church be visible now as we pass through a decisive period in history. We must be seen doing some kind of service, on behalf of the wider Episcopal Church, to bring more understanding." Kafity stressed that this effort also must be meaningful to Moslems and Israelis and further called for Christians to be ministers of reconciliation. "We need a voice of healing and love," he said.

DPS 88028/2

Kafity pointed out that the Christian community in Jerusalem was relatively small. Nevertheless, the leadership of the churches there is largely indigenous, a process begun by the Anglicans in 1958 and subsequently followed by the Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

He saw a convergence of the religious bodies. Early in the current crisis they drew up a statement addressing this. In essence the document calls for the Christian community "to pray for justice and peace," "to dedicate...a day of fasting and self-denial," and to observe "a day of prayer and preaching when fervent prayer will be offered...that justice and peace may be realized."

The message concluded:

...we again state unequivocally that all our Christian Churches in this country, standing together, seek real peace based on justice and which will never be established unless every person's rights are fully respected.

The document was read in all churches but was censored by the Israeli authorities.

The bishop delineated some of the problems occurring at the hospitals where casualties, who are generally treated free, sometimes are harassed by the authorities. Often he said, this harassment involves confiscation of their identity papers. When they try to claim them after being discharged from the hospital, they risk arrest, he added

Upon being asked what the Episcopal Church could do, he asked for support, both material and spiritual. Quoting from the resolution on the Palestinian situation developed at ACC-7, which he had also discussed with some rabbis, he asked, "What is the best way to open a dialogue between the American Jewish and Palestinian communities?" He suggested that the Episcopal Church might play a significant role here in encouraging dialogue between the religious factions in the area, in supporting an international conference, and in the education of the American public about the complexities and historic realities of the area.

DPS 88028/3

(Editor's Note: The Good Friday Offering is traditionally given to the Episcopal church in Jerusalem the Middle East. The Presiding Bishop strongly encourages support of this Offering.)

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THE PRESIDING BISHOP'S MESSAGE
EASTER 1988

"Why are you weeping?"

DPS 88029

The women at the tomb on Easter morning were the same women who stood grieving at the Cross. The women never abandoned Jesus, they did not deny him, they did not hide. They followed him to Golgotha and they went early in the day to the cemetery, witnessing to that love that does not end with death.

These women had been a part of Jesus' life and ministry. They has been witnesses to the passion of Jesus. They had been more than spectators along the Via Delorosa. They had participated in his humiliation and suffering. They must have shed many tears.

There was Mary Magdalene whom Jesus had rescued from a life which was not her own. There was Mary, his mother, who had been chosen to bear the Christ but had been told that a sword would pierce her heart.

There were other women in Jesus' life. Martha and Mary. Jairus' daughter. The woman with an issue of blood. The woman at the well. Jesus had entered each of their lives and, as he did for Mary Magdalene, brought each health, wholeness and hope. The story of each of these women is the story of a new creation.

The women were faithful to Jesus. Is it any wonder that they were at the tomb? Is there any wonder why it was to the women that the Resurrected Jesus first appeared?

The story of each woman in Jesus' life is a parable of liberation --- of resurrection. God chose Mary and blessed her; and the fruit of her womb was salvation, liberating women from the slavery of the guilt of Eve. Jesus redeemed Mary Magdalene from the demons that enslaved her and the society that trapped her into a life of shame as she sought love. Jesus brought the young girl back to life and lifted the demeaning social stigma from the woman with the issue of blood. Through Jesus, each of these women had tasted resurrection, the new order of creation, in her life. Through these women Jesus liberated all humanity from the burden of the oppression of women. Knowing suffering and humiliation in their lives, they stood with him at his end because they had experienced the pains of suffering, humiliation and death at the hands of a ruthless society. So, too, they understood resurrection.

Like the women, we each stand at the mouth of the grave. Each of us stands, like the women, knowing that Jesus has touched our lives, that he has offered us liberation from the things that bind us and bury us and cause us to decay. And we stand as a Church and society knowing that collectively, too, we have been called through him to resurrection.

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DPS 88029/2

"Why are you weeping?" (John 20:13)

Jesus' question to Mary at the empty grave was more a theological point than one of pastoral care.

Through the tears of hurt and pain, through the tears of humiliation and oppression, through the tears of grief and loss, through the tears of loneliness and hopelessness, it is sometimes difficult to see the Risen Lord. It is not until Jesus calls her name that Mary recognizes the Lord. The familiar, recognizable voice that had called her to a new life long before now beckons her anew. And, through the tears she sees the Lord.

Jesus calls each of us by name --- the name we received by our baptism into his death and resurrection. He calls each of us as we stand at the tomb. He calls each of us as our eyes are filled with hot tears. He calls us individually and corporately. And when we hear that familiar voice call our name it makes all the difference in how we perceive ourselves and our society. When we hear that voice we can say, "I have seen the Lord."

"Why are you weeping?" The Lord is risen, the Lord is risen indeed!

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THE PRESIDING BISHOP'S LETTER
THE EPISCOPALIAN, MARCH 1988

CAN WE TALK THEOLOGY?

DPS 88030

Editor's note: The Presiding Bishop will write a column from time to time titled "Can We Talk Theology?" This column will examine theology as the science of God, God's attributes and God's relationship to the universe. This is the first of the series and addresses Biblical Theology.

The Bible is the foundation for all Christian theology.

Theology is the science of understanding God's attributes and relationship to the universe. The word theology comes from the Greek theos (god or divine) and -ology (science or branch of knowledge). Biblical theology, then, is the understanding of God that is rooted in the books of the Old and New Testaments.

It is in the Bible that we have a record of the movement of God's self-revelation in human history. The study of the Bible enables us to reflect on this revelation, drawing assumptions about God's nature and the divine will for creation.

It is important to say that the Bible is foundational. Although it is an organic whole, including religious experiences, ideals, practices, institutions and beliefs, it not something that is finished or static. The Bible does not articulate a dogmatic or systematic or even moral theology. It provides the foundation for these disciplines. And we will discuss each of these applications of Biblical understanding in future articles.

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The Old and the New Testaments give testimony to the action of God in history. The text is a brilliant accounting by those inspired to the spiritual realities of their time. They portray an awareness and sensitivity to moral and spiritual values that transcend the limits of their age; their insights into the problems of humanity and the nobility of their perceptions of God have made them universal guides for all humanity.

To study the Bible is not only an exercise in history, it is an exercise in touching those transcendent values that rule the actions of all creation. To study the Bible is to give meaning to the present and hope for the future. A true reading of the Bible enables the reader to rise above even the historical account it attempts to relate. Through this quality of moving beyond the limits of human history, it gains its authority as the word of God.

Although the Bible does not pretend to provide a systematic or dogmatic theology, it does raise up universal themes that, when pieced together, form a theological perspective. For instance, one such motif is that of "servanthood."

From the account in Genesis of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, one can trace the course through the books of the Bible of the concept of what it means to be a servant of God. In the Books of the Prophets, especially Isaiah, the concept of servant found in the books written earlier in time is expanded. And the life and ministry of Jesus give a further dimension to our understanding of what it means to be a servant of God. The letters of Paul give even greater definition to the concept of servanthood. Now in each case, Abraham, Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, we find one facet of the relationship between God and humanity. The theology of servanthood is the biblical totality of these. So it is with every Biblical theme, be it creation, salvation, covenant, redemption. Each recorded experience gives the contemporary reader the building block for the construction of a biblical theology.

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The task of the contemporary reader is to take the total recorded experience of the Bible and place it alongside current realities of human existence. This makes the Bible eternally contemporary. This is the task of preaching, private Bible reading, group Bible study and discussion. These are invaluable tools in developing a Biblical Theology. This was the method of the early Christians and was certainly the approach of the early church thinkers.

This now leads us into future discussions because as soon as you take the understanding of the Bible, that is the Biblical Theology, and begin to add other, contemporary experience to it, you begin to develop Dogmatic, Systematic, or Moral Theology. Or, if you apply it to one perspective, let us say a feminist perspective, you will arrive at another set of understandings of God, God's nature, and God's relationship with the universe. Obviously, this is highly compressed and I will "unpack" it in future columns.

Biblical Theology is not static; it is a growing science in which every one of us has a part. To make it otherwise is to betray the Bible, to make it history or geography or anthropology. The real task is to read and listen prayerfully, to open one's mind and heart, one's whole being, to what is being heard. Then, with courage and integrity to fashion one's life, and the life of one's family, community and society, in faithfulness to the word that one hears.

Faithfully,

Edmond L. Browning
Presiding Bishop

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PLAY CELEBRATES MARY,

CONTEMPORARY WOMEN

DPS 88031

by Lindsay J. Hardin

NEW YORK (DPS, Feb. 25) -- Priest-playwright and Episcopal Church Foundation fellow John Dally, 30, speaks from the heart. His new play, House of Bread, reflects his understanding of contemporary women and how their experiences parallel those of Mary, the mother of God.

"The premise of the play is that women in particular understand the phrase, 'take, eat, this is my body, broken for you,'" said Dally. "This play is about Mary and the priesthood of women -- all women -- and how they give their bodies and spirits for the life of the world."

Scheduled to premiere in suburban Chicago on February 27, the play was commissioned by the Marian Dialogue Committee, a twenty-member group made up of representatives from the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago. The ecumenical venture between Episcopalians and Roman Catholics was organized by Phoebe Griswold, wife of the Rt. Rev. Frank Griswold, bishop of Chicago. "One of the reasons we chose John was because of his eloquence in speaking about women's concerns," she said. "He seems not only to be able to hear women, but to speak back what they say so that many people can hear it."

Several characters are depicted in House of Bread: an elderly nun who has seen her community go through radical changes; a minister's wife who has found her own life constrained by expectations of her husband's congregation; a professional woman who is unable to bear a child and must face that reality; and a young, unmarried, pregnant woman who has fled an abusive relationship.

"All four of the women reflect some aspect of the person and life of Mary," said Dally. "Mary is the one who brings God into the world through her own body. She symbolizes all women and each woman's experience finds a place in her."

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Dally, named an Episcopal Church Foundation fellow in January, is a doctoral student in hermeneutics at the University of Chicago and an assisting priest at the Church of our Savior, Chicago.

"One of the reasons John was chosen as a Fellow was his ability to translate religious ideas so freely into art -- and art that could affect many people at many different levels," said Jeffrey Kitross, executive vice president of the Foundation. "The fellowship he received will enable him to keep doing exactly what he does best -- that is, blending classic works with contemporary art."

Dally hopes that House of Bread, which he describes as "stark and austere," will raise issues for observers. The actresses begin by speaking in monologue and gradually speak to one another in dialogue and chorus, sharing their lives across bread, which is at the center of the group. At the conclusion, they break the bread, offering it to one another as an image of their own lives.

The author of nine plays and eight works for choir, Dally's work has been produced at Yale University, in New York City, and in Southern California. In addition, he has worked as parish priest for five years in Southern California, lectured in religion at Yale, and in theology at the Episcopal School of Theology in Claremont, California.

Dally hopes to establish a conservatory for the sacred arts following his doctoral work. Defining sacred art as "the art which springs from and represents the experience of redemption," Dally believes that such a conservatory would be the first of its kind.

"There currently exists no place where actors, painters, sculptors, musicians and other artists can come together to create art and study," said Dally.

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"Such artists experience a great loneliness. A conservatory, hopefully as part of a seminary or cathedral, would provide support for the artist and be an exceptional resource for the Church as well.

The play was written to celebrate the Marian year, which was recently announced by Pope Paul II to celebrate Mary and her contributions to the Christian faith. The Marian-Dialogue Committee was formed in July of 1987 as an outgrowth of a covenant agreement between Episcopalians and Roman Catholics in Chicago.

In addition to the initial performance on Feb. 27 at the Church of the Ascension, Oak Park, the play will also be performed at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Evanston, Ill. on March 4.

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PICTURE CAPTION

Priest-playwright named Fellow

(88031) -- The Rev. John Dally, named an Episcopal Church Foundation fellow in January, is a serious playwright and deeply concerned with the relationship of religion and the arts. His religious drama House of Bread, a moving offering in an Anglican/Roman Catholic dialogue on the role of Mary, offers insights into the priesthood of women.

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